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C O N F I D E N T I A L CHISINAU 000542

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/UMB

E.O. 12958: DECLASSIFY 07/14/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL RS MD

SUBJECT: MIXED ASSESSMENT SO FAR FOR NEW
ELECTORAL PERIOD

Classified by Charge d'Affairs a.i. Kelly
Keiderling under 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) After the Charge described President Obama's recent visit to Russia (septel), Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Valeriu Ostalep asked about the U.S.'s current assessment of the election campaign. The Charge noted we had heard indications that the Central Election Commission (CEC) was not prepared to invite ENEMO (European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations) to observe the elections. The Charge reminded Ostalep that President Voronin had told Ambassador Chaudhry that he welcomed observers. Perhaps the CEC hadn't heard about the President's remarks, the Charge mused. Given that the MCC Board was going to review Moldova's conduct of elections, among other issues, it would be a shame if Moldova closed its doors to observers, the Charge added.

¶2. (C) The Charge and the political officer (notetaker) offered Ostalep a broad, mixed assessment of electoral developments to date. In the negative column, the Charge listed putting PRO TV's frequencies up for tender when Moldovan law provided for the automatic renewal of licenses; freezing Chisinau municipality's bank accounts and thus hindering the city's efforts to check voter lists; threatening to shut down web portals unimedia.md and faces.md; giving OSCE/ODIHR a hard time in obtaining visas for Romanian, Serbian and Croatian observers; and making serious and non-credible accusations that the opposition wants to undermine Moldovan statehood.

¶3. (C) Some neutral developments included summoning former PM Vasile Tarlev and RFE Bureau Chief Vasile Botnaru to be questioned by prosecutors about the April 7 violence. The Charge noted that, depending on one's point of view, the questioning could be interpreted as harassment or as appropriate law enforcement work.

¶4. (C) As positive electoral developments, the Charge mentioned efforts to address the balance and fairness of TeleRadio Moldova and more open interaction with and information from the PCRM through former MP Grigore Petrenco.

¶5. (C) Ostalep argued that Unimedia had been publishing illegal inflammatory comments ("Kill the Communist"), and that the GOM was trying to force City Hall to pay fines, for which it was responsible, to the European Court of Human Rights. He said that some ODIHR observers had been turned back because they requested airport visas--something that had not been possible since

January 2008. The MFA had urged the ODIHR officials to apply for visas at any Moldovan embassy. On PRO TV, Ostalep said it was his understanding that a public tender of a frequency was required at the end of the licensing period; the Charge explained that the 2006 broadcasting law made renewal automatic (absent technical violations, such as percentage of local content). Moldovan authorities should simply implement the law and renew PRO TV's license, the Charge urged.

¶ 6. (C) She also noted that the GOM had created an atmosphere in which even such otherwise minor issues as the airport visa were interpreted as negative of GOM intentions. The GOM had created a bad impression and a crisis of trust, but during this electoral period had an opportunity to improve its image.

KEIDERLING